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ABSTRACT

Despite its supposed importance, children's emergent interest in literacy has been seldom studied. As a result, no easy-to-use and psychometrically sound measure of children's emergent interest in literacy exists. This study made an initial attempt at validating such a measure. On three separate occasions, 24 parents and their 2- to 3-year-old children completed the Brief Reading Interest Scale (BRISC), a measure of preschool children's interest in reading. In addition, parents reported how often their child asked to be read to at home, and they filled out reading logs to record how well their child's interest was maintained when read to at home. Finally, parents were videotaped in the lab reading picture books with their child. The reliability of the BRISC, as well as its ability to predict the other measures of child interest in reading, were examined. BRISC scores at the initial visit correlated .78 with BRISC scores collected 1 week later and .71 with BRISC scores that were collected 4 weeks after the initial visit. BRISC scores correlated -.23 with videotaped interest, .45 with parent reading logs, and -.49 with parents' report of how often their child asked to be read to. All correlations were in the expected direction as a lower score on the BRISC indicated more interest in shared reading. While the validity of the BRISC needs improvement, it appeared to have potential as a cost-effective measure of young children's interest in shared reading that might facilitate research on the influences and effects of interest. (Author/EV)

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ED 421 247

A Brief Rating Scale of Preschool Children's Interest in Shared Picture Book Reading

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Abstract

Despite its supposed importance, children's emergent interest in literacy has been little studied. As a result, an easy to use and psychometrically sound measure of children's emergent interest in literacy does not exist. The present study makes an initial attempt at validating such a measure. On three separate occasions, twenty-four parents and their 2-to 3-year-old children filled out the Brief Reading Interest Scale (BRISC), a measure of preschool children's interest in reading. In addition, parents reported how often their child asked to be read to at home and they filled out reading logs to record how well their child's interest was maintained when read to at home. Finally, parents were videotaped in the lab reading picture books with their child. The reliability of the BRISC as well as its ability to predict the other measures of child interest in reading was examined. BRISC scores at the initial visit correlated .78 ($p < .01$) with BRISC scores collected one week later and .71 ($p <. 01$) with BRISC scores that were collected four weeks after the initial visit. BRISC scores correlated -.23 (one tailed $p < .13$) with videotaped interest, .45 (one tailed $p < .07$) with parent reading logs, and -.49 (one tailed $p < .0075$) with parent's report of how often their child asked to be read to. All correlations were in the expected direction as a lower score on the BRISC indicated more interest in shared reading. While the validity of the BRISC needs improvement, it appears to have potential as a cost-effective measure of young children's interest in shared reading that might facilitate research on the influences and effects of interest.

A Brief Rating Scale of Preschool Children's Interest in Shared Picture Book Reading

Children's interest in academic activities is widely thought to be critical to their school success. In a poll of educational psychologists, four of the top ten problems faced by the field were related to children's academic interest (O'Flahavan, et al. 1992). Despite its assumed importance, academic interest has been little studied, and the few existing studies have focused on children in grade school or beyond (e.g. Brophy, Rashid, Rohrkemper, and Goldberger, 1983). The emergent stages of children's interest have been virtually ignored. A search of journals published in the last five years found only 3 empirical studies that focused on preschoolers' interest.

The few data that are available are consistent with the notion that interest in early academic activities, particularly shared reading, is critical to later academic success. For example, Crain-Thoreson and Dale (1992) selected 20-month-olds for verbal precocity and followed them through age 4 1/2. They initially observed children's interest during a storybook session and found that interest predicted language, cognitive, and literacy outcomes. This predictor was stronger than the frequency or type of parental behaviors observed during reading sessions. Wells (1985, 1986) obtained parental retrospective reports of how interested their children were in shared reading as preschoolers, and found that these reports were strongly related to their literacy development.

In sum, it seems likely that emergent child literacy interest is an important aspect of child development, but this area is in desperate need of increased study. Unfortunately, no inexpensive and well-validated methods of assessing child interest are available; a valid and cost-effective means of assessing child interest in shared reading might increase attention to this understudied area.

A few past studies have attempted to assess emergent child literacy interest. For example, Thomas (1984) interviewed parents as to their children's toy and literacy-related preferences. However, this procedure requires individual interviewing, and no information has been provided as to the procedure's validity, though the predictive power of the responses suggests that this procedure is promising.

Lonigan (1994) presented child interest data from diaries that parents filled out daily, in which they rated their children's interest from 1 to 5 during each reading session that was conducted. It is expected that these reports might well be more valid than general reports, given that they are more closely tied to specific behaviors. On the other hand, they do not avoid the potential problems of demand characteristics, response bias, and ceiling effects. The approach has the further limitation of requiring a fair amount of time and effort on the part of the parents, as well as multiple visits to a research site to return the forms. Thus noncompliance and differential attrition may become problems with this approach.

Observational measures of child engagement in shared reading avoid the problems described above, by providing a direct and objective measure of interest. When possible, such measures should be obtained. Unfortunately, however, such observations are not always feasible because of the time and expense required to collect observational data and train coders to make ratings of the observations. Hence there is a great need for a reliable and valid measure of child interest that is more cost-effective.

The present study presents reliability and validity information on a brief parent report measure of children's interest in shared reading, called the Brief Reading Interest Scale (BRISC). It is the first study to present such information on any measure of child interest in shared reading. We chose a format in which parents would rank-order their child's preferences for a number of

activities. Given that parents are forced to describe interest relevant to a number of other desirable activities (e.g. playing with another child or art activities), we suspected problems of demand characteristics and response bias would be reduced, resolving the ceiling effects seen with many other parent report measures. The specific activities that were rank-ordered are listed in Table 1. The aim of this study was to provide information on the scale's test-retest reliability, relationship with traditional parental report and diary methods of assessment, and correspondence with observational measures of interest.

Method

Participants

Twenty-four mother-child pairs participated. Children averaged 27 months of age (range = 24-38, SD = 5.6). Children were recruited via the birth announcements of three local Massachusetts counties. Most of the participants were European-American and middle or upper-middle class.

Materials

As shown in table 1, the BRISC consists of a sheet of paper with 10 activities that preschool children typically participate in. One of the activities is "Reading a book with parent or another person" Parents ranked all 10 activities in their child's order of preference. Children's BRISC score was simply the rank of "reading a book together". For example, if this item was the child's third favorite activity, a score of 3 was assigned. Thus, lower numbers reflect greater interest.

Procedure

Families who filled out the BRISC were participating in an experiment on the effects of an intervention designed to increase children's interest in shared reading. Twelve of the subjects

were randomly assigned to receive the intervention, while 12 were randomly assigned to a control group in which an attention placebo was administered. Participants visited the laboratory three times: the second visit occurred one week after the first, and the third visit occurred three weeks after the second.

At the first visit, all parents filled out a demographic questionnaire that also included questions about the families' reading habits. One part of the questionnaire asked parents to answer the question "how often does your child ask to be read to?" Responses consisted of 5 choices: hardly ever, once or twice a month, once or twice a week, almost daily, or more than once a day. This response was scored from 1 to 5 such that 1 corresponded to hardly ever, 2 to once or twice a month, etc. Parents also completed the BRISC at each visit. Finally, parents filled out reading logs to record how well the child's interest was maintained when read to at home, on a scale from 1 to 5, with 5 being the most interested. Following the completion of these questionnaires, parents were videotaped reading picture books with their child. These reading sessions ended when the child wished to stop, or after 10 minutes, whichever occurred first. The videotaped reading sessions were coded by undergraduate research assistants for child interest on a 1-7 scale, where 7 indicated the greatest interest. One-third of the segments were rated by a second coder in order to assess inter-rater reliability. At the second and third visits, parents returned their reading logs, reported how frequently their children asked to be read to, and filled out BRISCs.

Results

Descriptive Information

The mean score on the BRISC for all subjects at pretest was 4.6 (SE=2.0) out of 11. The average interest observed on the videotapes of parents reading to their children at pretest was 5.4

(SE=1.3) out of 7. The average score on the question regarding how often the child asks to be read to at pretest was 3.96 (SE=1.08) out of 5. Finally, the average score of child interest from the reading logs at pretest was 4.3 (SD=.34) out of 5. Only the reading logs of the control group parents (n=12) were used to calculate this mean because the intervention influenced the experimental parents' logs (Stowe, Ortiz, & Arnold, 1997).

Test-Retest Reliability

Test-retest reliability was calculated for children in the control group only. Since this group did not receive a reading intervention, their interest in reading was not expected to change significantly. BRISC scores at the initial visit correlated .78 ($p < .01$) with BRISC scores collected one week later and .71 ($p <. 01$) with BRISC scores that were collected four weeks after the initial visit.

Validity

Validity of the BRISC was assessed by comparing BRISC scores with observed child interest in shared reading (videotapes), with the question asking how often the child asked to be read to, and with the logs that parents kept about their child's interest in shared reading at home. At pretest, BRISC scores correlated -.23 (one tailed $p < .13$) with videotaped interest, .45 (one tailed $p < .07$) with the parent reading logs, and -.49 (one tailed $p < .0075$) with parent's report of how often their child asked to be read to. All correlations were in the expected direction as lower score on the BRISC indicated more interest in shared reading.

Discussion

The present study provides initial reliability and validity information of a brief parent-report rating scale of child interest in shared reading. The test-retest reliability of the BRISC was

assessed by comparing control group scores at pretest, posttest, and one-month follow-up. Reliability was adequate as scores were stable across a one-week and one-month period.

The criterion validity of the BRISC was assessed by examining the relationships between BRISC scores and children's interest on videotape, how often children asked to be read to, and parents' reports of child interest in reading. As expected, all correlations between BRISC scores and these criteria were negative. Parent reports of how often their child asked to be read to were statistically significantly related to BRISC scores. Average interest reported on parent reading logs and observed interest were moderately correlated with BRISC scores, although the correlations were not statistically significant.

All three correlations should be interpreted with caution. Only twenty-four subjects were included in the correlations between the BRISC and videotaped observations of children's interest and parents' reports of how often their child asks to be read to and only 12 subjects were included in the correlations between the BRISC and parents' interest logs. On the other hand, we believe that the correlations between BRISC scores and the videotape measure of child interest may have been attenuated by a large amount of random error. Specifically it seems likely that other variables such as child shyness could have been related to interest during videotaped observations, reducing the correlation between BRISC scores and videotaped interest. Replication should be done to further evaluate the reliability and validity of the BRISC. While the validity of the BRISC needs improvement, it appears to have potential as a cost-effective measure of young children's interest in shared reading that might facilitate research on the influences and effects of interest.

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Table 1

Items on the Brief Reading Interest Scale

Playing with blocks or other building toys

Playing with stuffed animals, dolls, etc.

Watching television

Playing ball

Art activities (such as coloring, finger painting, etc.)

Reading a book with parent or another person

Playing outside

Riding toys (tricycles, kid-sized cars, etc.)

Playing with parent(s)

Playing with another child

Other (Please specify activity:_____)